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SENSITIVE
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PREL, PINR, AMGT, TF, AE
SUBJECT: UAE CONFIRMS 5 H1N1 CASES, WANTS USG TRAINING

REFS: A) ABU DHABI 531
B) ABU DHABI 520
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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Health reported publicly on June 21 that it had confirmed five cases of H1N1 influenza, and told us privately that it had a sixth under surveillance. Ministry officials told EmbOffs that the sixth - a nurse - would be the first case of domestic transmission of the virus, if confirmed. The UAE is now conducting H1N1 testing at three domestic facilities. The deputy Health Minister requested a US influenza expert conduct an urgent awareness workshop for 20-30 Ministry officials, in an effort to educate the public. Despite the Ministry's efforts (reftels), residents continue to resist basic prevention efforts even as they express rising concern about the virus. END SUMMARY.

FIVE CASES CONFIRMED

12. (SBU) During a June 21 meeting with EconChief and ConChief, Ministry of Health Director General (deputy minister equivalent) and Chairman of the Technical Health Committee on Combating Swine Flu Dr. Ali bin Shukr reported the UAE had identified five H1N1 cases and was testing a sixth. The first case - a Pakistani resident who had visited Canada in May, was followed by an Emirati national who had returned from United States (via Thailand) and was confirmed to have H1N1 on June 17. Both have recovered and been released. Bin Shukr said three additional cases were confirmed June 18 among other residents who had traveled abroad. One is an Emirati national who is a pilot; another is an expatriate woman who arrived from abroad on June 19. A sixth case currently under surveillance is a nurse who had been in contact with a confirmed case.

13. (SBU) Although all cases apparently were exposed to H1N1 overseas, Bin Shukr said their illnesses were not detected at the airport on arrival. (Note: Thermal scans have been installed at Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Al Ain airports, as well as land borders, although arriving USG officials report not all passengers are scanned, particularly at the land ports of entry. End Note.) Bin Shukr said that the UAE now has H1N1 testing facilities at three local hospitals; results are available within 36 hours. Medical professionals determine if testing is required based on patients' symptoms and exposure risks.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CHALLENGES

14. (SBU) Noting that there is now a degree of "panic" among residents, Bin Shukr asked if a CDC or other USG official could visit the UAE to conduct a workshop for MoH officials. Bin Shukr

said an overview of key issues related to detection, transmission, prevention and public awareness would reinforce the Ministry's efforts. He noted that US expertise would be particularly well received by the local populace. With four cases confirmed in the past week, local residents are expressing rising concern. Many embassy contacts are reporting they are considering cancelling plans to vacation in the United States this summer.

15. (SBU) As an example of the challenge public health officials face, bin Shukr told EmbOffs that the second case - an Emirati man - had gone to a hospital when ill, but refused to stay for treatment. Bin Shukr said, upon his recommendation, the hospital called the police to ensure the man did not leave. The patient's father then came to the hospital to intervene; the police presence changed his mind.

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